PAROCHIAL ORGANIZATIONS

In the free world there are about 150 Lithuanian parishes. These parishes have many laywomen's religious organizations which foster the religious life of their members and are active in parochial and social welfare work.

LITHUANIAN WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE WORLD UNION OF CATHOLIC WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

A northern country, but situated close to the center of Europe, Lithuania always had her eyes turned westward. It had trade, cultural and diplomatic relations with the west. Lithuanian civic organizations eagerly followed the cultural and social advances being achieved in Western Europe.

Therefore when in 1930, the Union of Lithuanian Catholic Women's Organizations was advised that a world congress of Catholic women was to be convoked in Rome, it sent its delegates to take part in the congress, and became a member of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations (Secretariat in Paris). The W.U.C.W.O is active in the fields of religion, culture, equal rights and social justice, and has 36 million members throughout five continents.*

After World War II had swept over Europe and the Soviets had occupied Lithuania, the leaders of the Lithuanian Catholic Women's Union, now in exile, renewed their membership in the W.U.C.W.O.

In the 1947 world congress of Catholic women, the Lithuanians were represented by Dr. A. Šidlauskaitė She read a report on the fate that had befallen Lithuania. Dr. Šidlauskaitė told what life was like under Soviet occupation, and, in the name of her martyred people, begged for help, justice and freedom.

In the 1952 world congress, Mrs. Birutė Venskus and dr. Nijolė Braženaitė represented the Lithuanian women. In their reports they again brought the hard lot of enslaved Lithuania to the attention of the congress.

The Lithuanian delegates to the world congress of 1957 were: Mrs. B. Venskus, permanent Lithuanian delegate to the WUCWO; the Lithuanian Union's Vice-President, Mrs. Genevieve

* Statistics taken from the booklet — L'Union mondial des organizations féminines catholiques a cinquante ans. 1961, Paris.

Kaneb, and Mrs. Marcella Watkins. That year the WUCWO appointed Mrs. Venskus to its Central Board.

In 1961, the Lithuanian delegates to the WUCWO congress were: Mrs. P. Ivinskienė, Mrs. J. Lungienė, and Mrs. B. Venskus, from Europe, and Miss A. Uknevičiūtė from Melbourne, Australia. In the opening session of the congress, Mrs. Venskus depicted the difficult life of the women of captive nations, and the extreme persecution of religion in these countries. At this congress, Mrs. Venskus was elected chairman of the Commission on Marxist materialism. This same congress formed a permanent Commission for the Silent Church and for Refugees. Mrs. Venskus was named chairman and she drew up a program for the Commission. On the suggestion of the Commission, October 11th was designated as an annual Day of Prayer for the Silent Church beyond the Iron Curtain. All the organizations belonging to the Lithuanian World Union organize public commemorations on that day.

In the 1967 world congress in Rome, the Lithuanian delegates were: Monsignor J. Balkūnas, chaplain to the Lithuanian Union; Mrs. Venskus; Mrs. G. Kaneb, who also represented the American Lithuanian Roman Catholic Women's Alliance; Mrs. Angela Sungailienė, who represented the Canadian Lithuanian Catholic Women's Society.

In the opening session, Mrs. Venskus spoke in the name of all the Catholic women of the captive nations. She requested the delegates to observe a minute of silence in remembrance of all the women who could not come to the congress and who have been enduring grievous oppression for such long years. The inspiring theme of this congress was: "In a new world . . . women, co-fashioners of a new humanity." The Lithuanian delegates actively participated in the various workshops: Mrs. Sungailienė in the workshop "Women in the Family"; Mrs. B. Venskus in the "Ecumenical Dialog" workshop; Mrs. Kaneb was appointed English secretary of this workshop.

In the evening devoted to a "program of nations," where delegates presented their national songs, dances and poetry, Mrs. A. Sungailienė represented Lithuania with a poignant prayer contained in a book written by three Lithuanian young girls, exiles in Siberia, entitled: "Mary, Save Us." The reading of this prayer opened the evening. The congress ended with a Mass celebrated by Monsignor Balkūnas, who preached a sermon on the sufferings of the Church in Communist ruled countries.